



Weekly Briefing

**Slovenia Social briefing:
Think tanks in Slovenia
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Think tanks in Slovenia

Summary

Despite a long tradition of research and policy institutes the phenomenon of think tanks in Slovenia is rather recent. Think tanks are established in several various ways, with a research background, with a political party backing or as part of wider networks of think tanks or a certain global economic/political agenda. With the first such institutions only being established in the last decades, their status, functioning, financing and purpose is still fairly diverse and often untransparent. The clear politization of this type of institutions on the side of the political parties seems to contribute to the close entanglement between the current political power, while on the other hand this reduces the credibility and a more stable policy making impact of these institutions.

History and early development

The institutional structure in the Republic of Slovenia during the time of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia already developed a network of mainly research institutions, loosely connected with University and academia, whose main purpose was doctrinal and policy development. Despite many deviations of their nominal mission, these centers (e. g. most well known, the Marxist Centre of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia in Ljubljana) did function similarly to the model of think tanks, providing an intellectual and research support for the policy makers. During the 1980s, non-governmental civil society organizations were also growing stronger; many of them grew around strong intellectual and academic cores and had a wider social and political impact. After 1991 independence, most of the governmental institutions were either abolished or (in case of academia) restructured, while the NGO sector also underwent gradual structural reform.

Research institutions start serving as think tanks

New institutions of the think tank type started forming in the late 1990s, but were mostly organized as research institutes, linked to universities and new high education institutions. Peace Institute (Mirovni Inštitut), initially linked to the Open Society Institute in Slovenia, focuses on the contemporary social and political studies and provides research, analyses and expertise to state institutions, NGOs and private sector on human rights and minorities, politics, media, gender and cultural policies. Another institution, Institute for Civilisation and Culture, linked to the Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis graduate school, was established in 1997. It focuses mostly on research and policy consulting for government and private institutions in the fields of media, culture, safety and environment.

Recently, many academic institutions, especially research institutes, also started to open and provide their expertise to the government institutions, NGOs and private companies. Through various tenders and applicative private-public project calls, an important outlet is established for this sector of academia to start becoming think tanks as well. Among those the most active are independent research institutes, e. g. Institute for Ethnic Studies, Science and Research Centre Koper, and research institutes of Universities (e. g. Research Centre of the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana; Research Centers of the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana).

Think tanks of political parties

Among the right wing political parties, more explicit affiliations gave birth to three think tank institutions, linked to three most prominent right wing political parties.

First such institute was established in 2006 under the name of one of the right wing protagonists of the independence movement, Jože Pučnik, who passed away three years prior to that. The program of Dr. Jože Pučnik Institute is diverse,

spanning from education, event organization, consulting, expertise and publishing. It organizes a regular course called the “Jože Pučnik Academy”, where the topics range from national history to current political issues. The course is organized and led by the president and main protagonists of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and it aims to educate the party members and potential political cadres. The functioning of the think tank was also sponsored by Slovenian Democratic Party parliamentary group, through the resources, which are available for each group of members of the parliament to be spent on outsourced help. Between 2007 and 2013 this outlet provided the main income source of the Dr. Jože Pučnik Institute.

The right wing Christian democratic New Slovenia Party (NSi) established a similar institute three years later, in 2009. The Institute of Dr. Janez Evangelist Krek is named after one of the key theologians in early 20th century. Not entirely along the economic views of the Christian Socialist Krek, the institute serves as an important outlet of NSi liberal economic views, along with other political agendas. It organizes the New Slovenia Political Academy, where it educated the members of the New Slovenia political party on its program and goals. Apart from that it focuses on the social programs within the Christian democratic framework, with an emphasis on the status of workers and women. The think tank is regularly sponsored by one of the key energy companies, Eles, and, less regularly, by Post of Slovenia.

The third similar think tank, Dr. Anton Korošec Institute was established by Slovenian People’s Party in 2015, marking the 75th anniversary of the conservative politician Korošec’s death. Its agenda is similar to the previous two, but its program is less developed. As of now it mostly focuses on organizing debates and events and it also plans to start organizing its political party academy along the example of the other two think-tanks.

Economic liberalism think tanks

Another prominent and interconnected group of think tanks started to form in the last decade. Their common denominator and the stimulus was a US based network of think tanks, the Atlas Network. The network strives to promote economic liberalism with free-market economic policies, private-property rights, limited government, the rule of law, and market economics. In Slovenia, the first promoters of the liberalist think tank model were themselves trained in similar institutions within the Atlas network. Upon return, they established a series of loosely affiliated think tanks with similar programs. Among these, Mreža idej (The Network of Ideas), started as a sub-institute of Slovenian Democratic Party's Dr. Jože Pučnik Institute, but later became independent. They organize events, symposia, conferences and similar educational and networking events with mostly liberal economic speakers. Mreža idej mostly targets younger population. Svetilnik (The Lighthouse) think tank was established to promote ideas of economic freedom and political democracy among a wider audience. The founder of Svetilnik later went on to establish Visio think tank. Main topics that Visio focuses on are economic freedom, privatization of state companies, energy policies in European Union etc. The ideas of economic freedom are also ardently supported by Karantanija Institute, which mostly focuses on the legal aspects of the same topic.

Other think tanks

In 2002, Ifimes, International Institute for Middle East and Balkan studies was established, focusing on conflict prevention and resolution in the area of the Balkans and the Middle East. Ifimes organizes events and provides expertise and analyses for state and private institutions. Recently, the institute was involved in a media scandal, when it was discovered to have had provided dubious quality

research to a municipality owned company for a high payment, provoking many speculations about potential corruption and real nature of the financial transaction.

In 2004, the year Slovenia joined the European Union (on May 1st) the government established a separate institution to serve as a link between Slovenia and new accession countries and as a think tank for European Union and accession issues. The Centre for European Perspective, largely financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organizes educational and training programs, study visits, workshops, round tables and conferences, to provide assistance for partnering countries in their efforts towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

As one of the important institutions in Slovenia, the Catholic Church also followed the model in 2008 by establishing the Catholic institute, which would at the same time be a research hub and think tank of the catholic church, while also providing a starting point for the new Catholic University, which at the moment only consists of the Faculty of Business Studies.

In 2015, a well-known Slovenian banker Marko Voljč, established a small group of prominent individuals from business, economy and academia backgrounds, in an attempt to establish a think tank to debate and analyze the future strategies of Slovenia.

Conclusions

The current situation of think tanks in Slovenia is fairly heterogeneous. The administrative statuses that these institutions are established within are very different, ranging from academic institutes to private establishments. Their political affiliations are not very transparent either, which can mostly be detected in the unclear financing strategies. Institutions with very different budgets, from hundreds of euros yearly down to few thousand, are also financed in a number of different ways. Some rely mostly on tenders and research projects; others rely primarily on support of political parties or business entities, with the financing

often not being made very clear. In addition, sponsorships and donations from state owned companies are also a common practice. All these factors combined, most think tanks rely greatly on current political and business climate. The volatility of that makes it that more difficult to consistently provide quality services to a wider public beyond their limited networks.